

Barau's Petrel *Pterodroma barau* off the east coast of southern Africa

Andrew Sutherland

Le Pétrel de Barau *Pterodroma barau* au large de la côte orientale de l'Afrique méridionale. Un Pétrel de Barau *Pterodroma barau* a été vu à environ 20 km à l'est de Richards Bay (28°70'S 32°40'E), KwaZulu-Natal, Afrique du Sud, le 9 novembre 2003. Ceci constitue la troisième mention de cette espèce menacée pour l'Afrique méridionale. Les deux mentions précédentes concernent un, ou peut-être deux, individus au large de la Baie de Maputo, Mozambique, le 13–14 novembre 1987, et deux individus un peu au sud de Richards Bay, Afrique du Sud, le 18 octobre 1988.

Barau's Petrel *Pterodroma barau* is a medium-sized gadfly petrel characterised by white underparts, white underwings, a dark M-mark on the upperwings and lower back, and a dark cap. It was described as recently as 1964 and breeds in high-elevation elfin forest on Réunion Island, in the western Indian Ocean, and perhaps on Rodrigues, east of Mauritius (Probst *et al.* 2000, Stahl & Bartle 1991). The species is classified as Endangered (BirdLife International 2000, 2004), with a declining population currently estimated at 8,000–10,000 birds, although recent information indicates that the decline may have been arrested following the cessation of illegal shooting (BirdLife International 2000). A recent threat to young birds appears to be disorientation by lights at night, resulting in large numbers colliding with man-made structures (Le Corre *et al.* 2002).

The species' range at sea is poorly known. It disperses widely throughout the Indian Ocean, with records north towards the Arabian Peninsula, east off Sumatra and Australia, and south to Amsterdam Island (van den Berg *et al.* 1991, del Hoyo *et al.* 1992, Stahl & Bartle 1991). It is also recorded south-west of Réunion and south of Madagascar (R. Leslie pers. comm.). There are only two records from southern African waters, reported by Lambert (2001). The first was of one, possibly two, birds on 13–14 November 1987 off Maputo Bay, southern Mozambique, attending a prawn trawler within a mixed flock of *c.*1,000 seabirds, including White-chinned Petrels *Procellaria aequinoctialis*, Great-winged Petrels *Pterodroma macroptera* and Wilson's Storm-petrels *Oceanites oceanicus*. The second record was of two individuals at 29°48'S 34°46'E, just south of

Richards Bay, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, on 18 October 1988.

During a pelagic seabird-watching trip from Richards Bay on 9 November 2003, a single Barau's Petrel was observed at a distance of 12–100 m. The boat was in shelf-edge waters (>1,000 m deep) *c.*20 km east of Richards Bay (28°70'S 32°40'E). The petrel was attracted by chumming, which had brought in a number of White-chinned and Great-winged Petrels. It was at first thought to be a late-season Soft-plumaged Petrel *Pterodroma mollis*, a species that is common in this area up until early October. However, the white underwing (mostly dark grey in *P. mollis*) and distinct dark cap (less pronounced in *P. mollis*) eliminated that species and the bird was tentatively identified as a Barau's Petrel. This was confirmed by consulting Harrison's (1989) field guide on board.

It is noteworthy that all three sightings of Barau's Petrel in southern African waters to date have been in October–November. This trend would indicate that the species might be a passage migrant or visitor to southern African waters at this season. It may have been overlooked previously as pelagic seabird trips off KwaZulu-Natal have mainly concentrated on the trawling grounds over the continental shelf off Durban. Trips from Richards Bay are into deeper waters (>1,000 m) beyond the edge of the continental shelf. I have found that other *Pterodroma* species, such as Great-winged and Soft-plumaged Petrels, are much commoner in the deeper waters off Richards Bay than in the shallower trawling grounds (<600 m) off Durban.

Acknowledgements

David Allan and Peter Ryan commented on a draft of this note and helped with literature.

References

- van den Berg, A. B., Smeenk, C., Bosman, C. A. W., Haase, B. J. M., van der Niet, A.M. & Cadée, G. C. 1991. Barau's Petrel *Pterodroma baraui*, Jouanin's Petrel *Bulweria fallax* and other seabirds in the northern Indian Ocean in June–July 1984 and 1985. *Ardea* 79: 1–13.
- BirdLife International. 2000. *Threatened Birds of the World*. Barcelona: Lynx Edicions & Cambridge, UK: BirdLife International.
- BirdLife International 2004. *Threatened Birds of the World 2004*. CD-ROM. Cambridge, UK: BirdLife International.
- Harrison, P. 1989. *Seabirds: An Identification Guide*. Rev. edn. London, UK: Christopher Helm.
- del Hoyo, J., Elliott, A. & Sargatal, J. (eds.) 1992. *Handbook of the Birds of the World*. Vol. 1. Barcelona: Lynx Edicions.
- Lambert, K. 2001. Sightings of new and rarely recorded seabirds in southern African waters. *Marine Orn.* 29: 115–118.
- Le Corre, M., Ollivier, A., Ribes, S. & Jouventin, P. 2002. Light-induced mortality of petrels: a 4-year study on Réunion Island (Indian Ocean). *Biol. Conserv.* 105: 93–102.
- Probst, J. M., Le Corre, M. & Thébaud, C. 2000. Breeding habitat and conservation priorities of *Pterodroma baraui*, an endangered gadfly petrel of the Mascarene archipelago. *Biol. Conserv.* 93: 135–138.
- Stahl, J.-C. & Bartle, J. A. 1991. Distribution, abundance and aspects of the pelagic ecology of Barau's Petrel (*Pterodroma baraui*) in the south-west Indian Ocean. *Notornis* 38: 211–225.
- PO Box 10289, Meerensee 3901, South Africa.
E-mail: scobie8@iafrica.com